

allowing them access to white neighborhoods and other institutions. Such a separatist society means further excluding members of oppressed groups from mainstream systems and institutions. Separatism by dominant groups is often fueled by prejudice and discrimination. On the other hand, members of non-dominant groups have at times made decisions to live as separately as possible from dominant culture. Their desire to separate is usually a response to being left out of mainstream society, of not feeling safe, and of seeing little chance of social and economic success if they remain within the dominant culture.

Although separatism can offer members of oppressed groups relief from fear of rejection, violence, and being outsiders, it can also cause problems. A person can belong to more than one oppressed group, and such a person would have to choose one group over the others. For example, a lesbian of color who might choose to live in a women-only community would lose connection with her community of color. Separatism also makes it hard for different oppressed groups to find common ground on areas of mutual concern. This makes creating coalitions for change very difficult.

Overcoming Social Injustice **LO4**



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Civil Rights

Civil rights are the rights to which people are entitled because they are members of society. These rights afford people legal protection from discrimination and oppression. Throughout American history, oppressed groups have been denied equal access to political, social, and economic institutions. For example, for many years, only white men could vote. Employers could legally refuse to hire a person because he or she had a disability, was Latino, or was Jewish, among other reasons. African Americans were forced to sit in the back of buses, attend separate schools, and use *colored only* drinking fountains.

The list of discriminatory practices is long, and members of all oppressed groups discussed in this chapter have been denied some rights. Members of oppressed groups have spent years organizing and fighting to gain civil rights protections, and the battle is still being waged. When people's civil rights are protected, society becomes more socially just.

Protection from Discrimination

Over the years, a number of significant efforts have been made to legislate protection from discrimination in the United States. Most of these efforts have

come after significant pressure was brought to bear on legislators by members of oppressed groups and their supporters.

The **Fourteenth Amendment** to the Constitution, which became law after the Civil War in 1868, offered early civil rights protection to US citizens. According to this amendment, no state may "deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the law." Even after slavery was outlawed and the South defeated in the Civil War, it was clear that African Americans, particularly those in the southern states, would not be afforded civil rights and protection from discrimination without intervention by the federal government. At first the effects of the Fourteenth Amendment were limited because the federal government was unwilling to take on the long and difficult task of forcing change in southern society (Segal, 2012).

The **Fifteenth Amendment**, enacted into law in 1870, gave all men, regardless of race or color, the right to vote. For almost a hundred years after its passage, most African American men were kept from voting by discriminatory practices such as poll taxes and literacy tests. Voting by women was deliberately excluded from the Fifteenth Amendment. The **Nineteenth Amendment**, which guarantees women the vote, was first introduced in 1878 and, after years of organizing and advocacy work, became law in 1920.

One of the most important steps taken toward achievement of civil rights in the United States was passage of the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**. The act was in large part a result of work by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other activists in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. It outlawed discrimination or segregation in public accommodations and employment on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, or national origin as well as unfair or differential treatment of people of color in voter registration (Dye, 1992). Additionally, the Civil Rights Act gave the federal government the right to enforce antidiscrimination laws and punish people who broke them, and it gave individuals the right to sue those who discriminated. The **Civil Rights Act of 1968** added protection against discrimination in housing.

In 1967, Congress passed the **Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA)**. This Act protects employees who are 40 years old or above from being treated differently at work on the basis of their age. The law, which applies to companies with 15 or more employees, is designed to eliminate the practice of terminating older employees based on stereotypes that older people are slower, harder to train, more out of touch with technology, and less adaptable to change than their younger counterparts. Since 1967, laws have been passed that gave older people protection in other areas, including education (Age Discrimination Act of 1975) and benefits (Older Workers Benefit Protection Act of 1990).

Several oppressed groups were not protected against discrimination in the civil rights legislation passed in the 1960s. These groups continued to advocate for equal legal protection. The **Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)**, US Government, 1990), the result of many years of organizing and lobbying by disability activists, provides comprehensive civil rights protections for people with disabilities. It outlaws discrimination against people with disabilities in public accommodations, employment, transportation, and public